Highlights 2002–03

The Journey Continues

The Nova Scotia Advisory Council on the Status of Women observed its 25th anniversary in 2002–03. We marked the occasion with a number of successful celebrations and events, while continuing our important work of advising government and bringing forward the concerns of women. This highlights report will give you some insight into our most important accomplishments for the year. The full accountability report for the year is available on our web site, at www.gov.ns.ca/staw.

We marked the 25th anniversary of the Advisory Council through a forum, "The Journey Continues," which brought together more than 60 women, including some of the leaders and pioneers of Nova Scotia's women's movement, to recognize achievement and to identify future directions for women in the province. The celebrations culminated in a sold-out International Women's Day concert, called Celebrating Women, held at Pier 21. We were honoured by the attendance of Governor General Adrienne Clarkson and Beverley McLachlin, Chief Justice of Canada.

In 2002–03, we published:

- Women and Healthcare (in response to the Royal Commission on Health Care Reform),
- a brief on voyeurism (for the federal Department of Justice),
- a statistical report on women's education and training, and
- a backgrounder on women's issues.

Publication and website usage hit an all-time high, at 25,000 publications downloaded or requested and 68,000 website visits. Print media reported 46 times on the Council's work. Topics included women's history, women in politics workshops, transition house funding, women and healthcare, and our statistical publication on women and education.

Partnerships with communities, organizations, and agencies are crucial to advancing equality for women in programs and services. Among others, we worked with:

- Atlantic Centre of Excellence for Women's Health on the Healthy Balance research program
- Nova Scotia Women's FishNet on an information kit on health policy.

Her Excellency Adrienne Clarkson, the Governor General of Canada, attended the Celebrating Women concert as part of the Council's 25th anniversary celebrations.

Our Accomplishments

Workshops on women's political involvement greatly increased the likelihood of their participation in politics.

Strategic Goal: Inclusion

A Heritage Tea for African Nova Scotian women from Cumberland County brought out 25 women's stories of challenge and achievement. A 30-minute follow-up video will chronicle the oral histories of Black women from the county. It will be completed in 2004–05.

Highly successful political involvement workshops attracted 62 women in Amherst, Port Hawkesbury, Sydney, and New Glasgow. These events consistently increased the likelihood that women would get involved in politics: between a third and half of participants reported that as a result of attending, they would be more likely to participate in some level of politics. The Advisory Council updated the publication *Votes for Women: A Political GuideBook for Nova Scotia Women* for release in 2003–04.

Techsploration introduced 49 female Grade 9 students in eight schools to trades, technical and technology-related occupations. The Advisory Council advises and supports the program's Steering and Expansion committees.

Through participation in the Social Inclusion Reference Group of the Population and Public Health Branch of Health Canada, the Advisory Council contributed content advice to the publication *An Inclusion Lens: Workbook for Looking at Social and Economic Exclusion and Inclusion.* Staff also advised the Department of Community Services (Special Initiatives) in the development of a stakeholder consultation on social inclusion.

Staff and Council involvement in the federal-provincial Sustainable Communities Initiative (SCI) ensured that women were included in this work. The SCI aims to promote better communication and co-ordinated action on the sustainability of rural communities. The SCI business plan for 2003–04 includes a process to ensure that issues related to gender and social inclusion are integrated into the initiative.

Strategic Goal: Economic Equality

The Federal/Provincial/Territorial Forum of Senior Status of Women Officials focused in 2002–03 on women's entry to occupations in high-growth areas of the economy. In Nova Scotia, the Council struck a working group to increase the representation of women in the construction trades. Representatives from the Construction Sector Council and the Skills Development and Training and Apprenticeship divisions of the Department of Education participated.

The Advisory Council was also actively involved in a regional Innovation Summit organized by Industry Canada and contributes to the Nova Scotia Skills Agenda through involvement in the Labour Force Planning Committee.

The Advisory Council established the Nova Scotia Round Table on Women's Economic Security in 2002 to enable the provincial and federal governments and community organizations interested in women's economic security to share information and collaborate on initiatives. The Round Table developed its terms of reference and priority issues, and the Advisory Council commissioned a background paper on transition to employment programs for low income women.

The Advisory Council released *Learners and Teachers: Women's Education and Training*, which highlights changes in women's educational attainment and outcomes over the past 25 years. In Nova Scotia, women have made great gains in terms of attaining the same level of education as men, in all fields except applied science and technology and trades programs.

Strategic Goal: Eliminating Violence Against Women

Council responded in October 2002 to a Department of Justice consultation on including voyeurism as an offence under the *Criminal Code* of Canada. Voyeurism is increasing partly because of new technologies for viewing, recording, and distributing pornographic material. It creates victims who are unaware of the invasion of their privacy and their use as subjects for the sexual stimulation of others. Estimates that 20 per cent of perpetrators go on to commit sexual assault are also of concern. Including voyeurism in the *Criminal Code* would help protect unwitting victims and prevent further criminal acts, such as sexual assault.

Council continues to be involved in a number of justice issues related to family or sexual violence. These include consultations on restorative justice as well as the issue of self-represented accused and the cross-examination of victims. Council provided input to the Law Amendments Committee on the development of the *Domestic Violence Intervention Act* and participated in follow-up consultations on its implementation.

As has been the case in past years, Advisory Council staff produced an up-to-date fact sheet on woman abuse in preparation for the National Day of Remembrance and Action on Violence Against Women. Council's most popular publication, *Making Changes: A Book for Women in Abusive Relationships, 3rd Edition*, continued to be well-used by the public, with more than 11,000 copies being either downloaded from the web site or distributed in hard copy on request from helping organizations and professionals.

Strategic Goal: Improved Health and Well-Being

The Council submitted a brief on *Women and Healthcare* to the Royal Commission on the Future of Health Care in Canada. The Council urged the Commission to maintain a strong, publicly funded healthcare system and to view healthcare as a long-term investment which will benefit the health of individuals and communities. Council advised the Department of Health on changes to long-term care payments for seniors. Subsequent policy changes improved the situation and are a step toward aligning Nova Scotia with provinces outside Atlantic Canada.

The Healthy Balance Research Program is in its third of five years. It was funded for $1.7 million by the Canadian Institutes for Health Research to investigate the health impacts on women of caregiving roles, in combination with paid work and empowerment in their lives.

By the end of 2002–03:

- the four research teams had begun to analyze data from 18 focus groups held around the province; finalized the questionnaire for the population-based survey; and presented the article *Taking its Toll: Implications of Paid and Unpaid Work Responsibilities for Women's Well-Being* at conferences.

Council continues to be involved in a number of justice issues related to family or sexual violence, including consultations on restorative justice, the rights of self-represented accused and the cross-examination of victims, and voyeurism as a crime.

Jessica LeBlanc and Tara McMullen took part on the Young Women Speak Out panel at the Journey Continues forum.

In its third year, the Healthy Balance Research Program continued to analyze data, enhanced Nova Scotia's research capacity through scholarships for two graduate students, and developed its ongoing relationship with four groups of women often overlooked in research: African Nova Scotian, Aboriginal and immigrant women and women with disabilities.

- Nova Scotia's capacity for research was enhanced by scholarships for two graduate students in the Family Studies and Gerontology Department at MSVU; an undergraduate student completed a practicum with Healthy Balance.

- connections with particular communities were strengthened through involvement of the Equity Reference Groups — African Nova Scotian women, Aboriginal women, immigrant women, and women with disabilities.

Council staff participated on the Nova Scotia Interdepartmental AIDS Liaison Committee and the Nova Scotia Round Table on Youth Sexual Health.

Council staff helped Nova Scotia Women's FishNet to publicize and market FishNet's Good Policy, Good Health kit. Staff partnered with FishNet on a successful $25,000 funding application to the IWK Foundation for a follow-up project that will include a facilitation guide and workshops to implement Good Policy, Good Health in three coastal communities.

Council staff supported the development of a community-based committee to organize a workshop for health-care service providers and those affected by fetal alcohol spectrum disorder (FAS-D).

Other Accomplishments:

This year marked the first in which the Advisory Council offered its bi-weekly electronic news bulletin, *NewsBytes*, as a replacement for its quarterly print newsletter. *NewsBytes* has become a valuable tool for informing the Council's stakeholders of events and information that is of interest to the women's community.

Council Members:
Cape Breton Region
Patricia LeBlanc
Rita Warner, Chair of Council

Valley/Fundy Region
Candy J. Palmater
Sonja Power

Highland Region
Doreen Paris
Mary Elizabeth (Liz) Chisholm

Central Region
Linda Carvery
Mary Hamblin
Nancy Leaman

Council's Role
We accomplish our strategic goals by advising the Minister Responsible for the Status of Women on the concerns and priorities of women; formulating strategies and options; collecting and disseminating information on women's issues; bringing forward concerns of women from across Nova Scotia, with particular attention to historically disadvantaged groups.

Nova Scotia Advisory Council on the Status of Women

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